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ABSTRACT

Although "whistle blowing" (public protest by employees of management decisions) is being reported with increasing frequency, this paper points out that organizational communication researchers have not examined the phenomenon. The paper offers a review of current literature on the topic and presents a model, drawn from an examination of 51 whistle blowing episodes, of the steps through which such incidents progress. It also reviews selected areas of organizational communication literature and makes several recommendations for reducing the need for whistle blowing drawn from this literature. A list of the 51 whistle blowing episodes examined is appended. (FL)

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WHISTLE BLOWING: IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS

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INTRODUCTION

There is a growing tendency for employees of organizations, especially scientists and engineers, to challenge management decisions (16). In challenging management decisions, employees may protest within the organization or they may protest to the public. This latter avenue of protest is often termed "whistle blowing" and appears to be increasingly common (48). Although whistle blowing is occurring with increasing frequency or at least is being reported more frequently, there is, as yet, no significant "literature of whistle blowing" (38), and researchers have not yet focused upon the determinants, forms, or outcomes of whistle blowing events.

In a recent article in the Journal of Communication, Carney (9) noted the absence in organizational communication research of studies in the area of communication between organizations (or individuals in organizations) and society, such as in whistle blowing, and called for research into this neglected area. There appear to be three reasons for this neglect. First, organizational communication researchers have typically looked at organizational phenomena from management's point of view (9). Whistle blowing is, by definition, an anti-management act and, therefore, has been ignored. Second, there is no specific, well-developed literature of whistle blowing from which to draw generalizations and hypotheses. Third, information about specific whistle blowing events is difficult to obtain. Although some cases, such as A. Ernest Fitzgerald's exposure of Air Force cost overruns, are well-documented (12, 35, 59), many are described very briefly in general discussions of organizational problems (see, for example, 15). Thus, whistle

blowing is an increasingly frequent organizational phenomenon which presents several problems for communication researchers and has, thus, been ignored.

The present paper examines whistle blowing as an organizational phenomenon. This paper contains an overview of current literature on whistle blowing. A model of the steps through which whistle blowing incidents progress is drawn from an examination of 51 whistle blowing incidents. Selected areas of organizational communication literature are reviewed, and several recommendations for reducing the need for whistle blowing are drawn from this literature.

Whistle Blowing as an Organizational Phenomenon

Blumberg (4) and Ewing (15) cite court decisions which indicate that Americans do not have the same rights, such as freedom of the press, speech and due process, at work as they do at home. This "rightlessness" is most conspicuous for employees, such as scientists and engineers, who do not belong to unions (15, 31, 37, 58) and stems, in part, from the idea that the employer and employee are "equal partners to the employment agreement. Just as the employee is free to resign whenever he/she wants, so the employer is free to show him/her the door whenever it desires" (15). The assumption behind the "legal notion of freedom of contract" is that an employee can leave a firm and find comparable employment with little difficulty (15). Nonetheless, as Blades points out in (3 , p. 1407): "It is the fear of being discharged which above all else renders the great majority of employees vulnerable to employer coercion." He maintains that "only the unusually valuable employee has sufficient bargaining power to obtain a guarantee that he will be discharged during a specified term of employment only for 'just cause'" (3, pp. 1411-1412). The great majority of employees are viewed as expendable. Thus, an employee's threat to quit his/her job has little power in

effecting change in an organization.

Despite the little effect employees have upon management decisions, society depends on the professional integrity of the experts in an organization to assure that management decisions will not harm society (57). Professionals, such as scientists and engineers, are often bound by an explicit code of ethics such as the National Society of Professional Engineers' Code of Ethics which states the engineer "will regard his duty to the public welfare as paramount." The engineer is instructed to "notify the proper authority of any observed conditions which endanger public safety and health" if "his engineering judgment is overruled by nontechnical authority." Thus, as Morse notes (in 34, p. 219): "Engineering ethics, from the viewpoint of industry, will rise or fall on the decisions of the engineer himself." Application of engineering ethics in actual cases, may, however, result in "gray-areas" (2) since the engineer is also technically bound to uphold his client's best interests in all cases (20). Such a resulting dilemma would be especially acute for the older engineer who might find job security in competition with ethical interests (20).

One response of the ethical engineer to a perceived problem in his/her organization is "whistle blowing." The basic assumption behind this response is that employees who disagree on ethical grounds with their employers about organizational policy should not quit, but should speak out (15, 59).

According to Nader et al. (in 35, p. vii), whistle blowing is:

> the act of a man or woman who, believing that the public interest overrides the interest of the organization he serves, publically "blows the whistle" if the organization is involved in corrupt, illegal, fraudulant, or harmful activity.

Thus, whistle blowers challenge organizational heads "who appear to be engaged in illegal, immoral, or irresponsible activity" (35, pp. 76-77). A whistle

blower is "the muckraker from within, who exposes what he considers the unconscionable practices of his own organization" (38, p. 4), or "the insider who feels compelled to tell all to the outsiders" (61, p. 168). In general, the whistle blower "believes he can best rectify unethical behavior in business or government by making his charges and identity public" (27, p. 1). Walters (in 59, p. 26) offers a comprehensive definition of the whistle blower's actions when he notes that:

> having decided at some point that the actions of the organization are immoral, illegal, or inefficient, he or she acts on that belief by informing legal authorities or others outside the organization.

Thus, whistle blowers, who may be federal employees (12) or employees of corporate organizations, put their duty to the public above their loyalty to the organization (13, 58).

Peters and Branch (38) distinguish between two types of whistle blowers: the "pure" whistle blower who speaks out while still employed by the institution he/she is attacking, and the "alumnus" whistle blower who leaves the organization before attacking its policies.

Political conservatives may date the beginning of whistle blowing as 1963 when Otto Otepka gave classified documents to a Senate subcommittee claiming that the Kennedy administration was harboring Communists in the State Department. Otepka, fired by Dean Rusk, defended his actions by claiming he had a "higher loyalty" to the nation and felt it should be protected from Communists (38). Liberals would probably date the first occurrence of whistle blowing as 1966 when James Boyd revealed Senator Thomas Dodd's unethical campaign finance practices to the public through Drew Pearson-Jack Anderson columns (38).

Unfortunately, "whistle blowing" is a flippant label for a very serious

act. Peters and Branch (in 38, p. 18) claim the name is derived from "the charicature of the bulbous-cheeked English bobby wheezing away on his whistle when the maiden cries 'Stop, thief!" They note, however, that the flippant label may be useful because it avoids the connotation of treason. They believe (in 38, pp. 18-19) that:

> Whistle-blowing is severely hampered by the image of its most famous historical model, Judas Iscariot. Martin Luther seems to be about the only figure of note to make much headway with public opinion after doing an inside job on a corrupt organization.

Whistle blowing is, thus, an indication that "the rules and guidelines for resolving disputes and failures within an organization have been insufficient" (38, p. 291) and that the situation is so serious it demands public attention.

There have been a large number of whistle blowing cases involving professionals employed by industry and government (57). In a survey of 800 members of the National Society of Professional Engineers, von Hippel reports that most of the respondents had at one time or another felt obliged to question some of the activities in which their organizations were involved. "When asked to work on a product or project they believed not to be in the public interest" seven percent of the respondents said they had sought transfer within the organization and another seven percent said they had resigned. Over 20 percent refused to work on a project or on a client's commission or to accept a job offer for this reason; and 60 percent had "expressed their disapproval of a project to their employer or client" (57, p. 9). As Olson reports (in 36, p. 32), however, "how forceful this disapproval was, is unknown." Von Hippel maintains that this survey indicates that known cases of whistle blowing may be only the tip of a rather large iceberg. Other authors agree (cf. 15, 31).

Descriptions of Specific Whistle Blowing Events

In general, writers concerned with whistle blowing have encouraged others to blow the whistle by justifying the actions of known whistle blowers while stressing the consequences of such serious action.

To encourage whistle blowing, in the spring of 1975, the Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) issued a report urging scientists and engineers to blow the whistle on their employers when they saw their work being used for "morally dubious ends" (15, p. 184). In the same year, Senator Edward Kennedy "sponsored hearings...to publicize the cause of government employees who spoke out against illegal or immoral actions in their agencies" (15, p. 77).

Although the AAAS and the Kennedy hearings encouraged conscious acts of whistle blowing, Dudar (in 12, p. 52) maintains "most people who wind up in the fraternity /of whistle blowers/ begin almost accidently, expecting gratitude and encountering, instead, a stone wall of either indifference or hostility." Apparently, much of the whistle blowing which does occur is a result of organizations' unresponsiveness to employees (59). In a study of university students, Turner (in 54, p. 1) reports students "believed their freedom of expression was impaired, not becuase anyone actively prevented them from speaking, but because no one would listen, understand, or care." This is perhaps the whistle blower's plight. He/she feels management will not listen to what he/she views as legitimate concerns.

Several writers have indicated that managers are unresponsive to employee concerns. For example, Silver (47) claims most employee complaints are "insubstantial," while Thompson (52) claims most managers feel employees will see that management is "right" if they are given "the facts." Walters (59)

believes managers should respect employees' rights to disagree with organizational policy not because it is the employees' fundamental right, but because it is in the best interest of the organization.

As a result of such attitudes, Nader et al.(35) maintain the most vulnerable whistle blower is the one who speaks out from within an organization. Accordingly, most whistle blowers have reached what Peters and Branch (38) call a "career plateau," because blowing the whistle may lead to explusion from the organization and, often, the end of a career.

In an often-quoted attack, James M. Roche, Chairman of General Motors Corporation, states (in 17, p. 52):

> Some of the enemies of business now encourage an employee to be disloyal to the enterprise. They want to create suspicion and disharmony and pry into the proprietary interests of the business. However, this is labeled--industrial espionage, whistle blowing, or professional responsibility--it is another tactic for spreading disunity and creating conflict.

Even when managers recognize the legitimacy of blowing the whistle, many react as does Dr. Arthur Bueche, Vice President for Research with General Electric, who notes how difficult it often is "to distinguish between those who are blowing the whistle and those who are crying wolf" (15, p. 227). Bueche believes an employee who chooses to make a "public attack" on his organization should be willing to resign (62).

Thus, Boulden (in 6, p. 43) warns engineers that "any effort to... speak out against company practices, will be interpreted by your employers and fellow workers as disloyalty and near treason." He maintains whistle blowing almost never has a positive effect on an engineer's career, and the "odds are that management will not only attempt to brand your statements as falsehoods, but may also attack your veracity and competence" (6, p.44). Peters and Branch (in 38, pp. 15-16) describe the "typical" response to a

whistle blowing attempt:

> A whistle-blower's antagonists will probably do something like the following: hand the press a 2,000 page, computer-blessed study by experts in support of their position; cite national security, job protection, or economic emergency as the justification for their actions; impugn the person with the whistle as an unqualified, self-seeking, disloyal, and moderately unbalanced underling who just doesn't understand the complexities that converge at the top; call for further study of the problem; and retire to dinner with their lawyers.

An article in Time (51) notes that most employees who oppose corporate policy are fired, demoted, or forced to resign.

Often, the whistle blower will be subjected to what Blades (in 3, p. 1413) terms "abusive discharge" in which the employee is "discharged as a result of resisting his employer's attempt to intimidate or coerce him in a way which bears no reasonable relationship to the employment." The "abusive discharge" is apt to be malicious because, as Ewing (in 15, p. 200) notes: "When a competent employee with years of service is fired for refusing to submit to a boss's improper or over-reaching demands, the boss feels guilt in a way not experienced when firing an employee for incompetence or laziness." Stone (in 48, pp. 214-215) suggests: "People who feel...threatened by whistle blowing will inevitably seek to 'make an example' of the whistle blower: by firing, demotion, or harrassment." The whistle blower is seen as a threat to the hierarchical organization (15, 48). An organization may pay some price for the loss of an employee, but an employee is likely to pay the higher price. Ewing (in 15, p. 38) cites a sociologist who has called "abusive discharge" the "organizational equivalent of capital punishment."

Potential results of whistle blowing pose a dilemma for the potential whistle blower. He must call for help loudly enough so that he receives public attention, but he must not appear to be gratifying his own ego (38).

His call is more likely to be heard and believed if he appears to clearly lose from his act. Although he loses his career, as Peters and Branch (in 38, pp. 287-288) note: "The strengths on which whistle-blowers have relied is basically that they have been judged right by most of the people who have studied the conflicts from outside the battle area." Some whistle blowers may find comfort in the fact that nearly all whistle blowers who have been punished for their views win their cases when they challenge their punishment in court (59). D'Aprix (in 11, pp. 29-30) maintains:

> in a highly traditional organization, communication is ritualized....There is considerable emphasis on communication up and down a chain of command. The worker is not permitted to air his grievances to his boss's boss without first seeking permission and approval.

Most employees usually do seek approval first (59). Boulden (6) warns engineers that they should always speak first to their supervisor when they have information about an unsafe product or condition within the company. Employees, however, are most likely to go directly to the public with their concerns when their criticisms have met with "bureaucratic runarounds, deaf ears, or hostility" in the past (59, p. 30).

As discussed previously, information on specific whistle blowing events is limited. The present author collected information on 51 separate whistle blowing incidents.[1] The amount of information available on these events ranged from one paragraph descriptions in general overviews of whistle blowing (cf. 15) to extensive discussions of cases which were well publicized (cf. accounts of the Goodrich air brake problems in 35 and 55).

An examination of these 51 separate whistle blowing events reveals consistent patterns of events in "pure" whistle blowing incidents (i.e., in instances where the whistle is blown by a person who is still an employee of

[1] A list of these incidents is included at the end of this article.

the organization) and in "alumnus" whistle blowing incidents (i.e., in instances where the whistle is blown by someone who is no longer a member of the organization).

In pure whistle blowing incidents, the events occur in the following order (although some steps may be omitted):

Step 1: An organizational member becomes aware of an organizational product or policy which he/she feels is unethical, immoral, or illegal and/or will endanger the public.

Step 2: The organizational member expresses his/her concerns to his/her immediate superior(s). The member perceives that his/her superior(s) is not going to act upon his concerns.

Step 3: The organizational member expresses his/her concerns to administrators higher up in the corporate or governmental hierarchy. The member perceives the administrators are not going to act upon his/her concerns.

Step 4a: The organizational member takes his/her concerns to the regulatory body (such as a Congressional subcommittee, the courts, the Atomic Energy Commission) which is charged with overseeing the organization or government agency. This step, by definition, makes the member's concerns public.

and/or

Step 4b: The organizational member takes his/her concerns to the public press, which then publicizes them.

Step 5: The organizational member is isolated by his/her superiors (for example, his/her assistants are taken away and other organizational members are instructed to avoid him/her).

Step 6: The organizational member is expelled from the organization; he/she is either fired or forced to resign.

In the 25 cases of pure whistle blowing examined, only two deviated from this pattern. In one case, Step 5 occurred before Step 4b; and in the other case, Step 4a occurred, then Steps 5 and 4b.

There are, in essence, two types of alumnus whistle blowers: those who

voluntarily resign from an organization before blowing the whistle and those who are expelled (fired or forced to resign). The following stages typically occur in alumnus whistle blowing incidents (although some steps may be omitted):

Step 1: An organizational member becomes aware of an organizational product or policy which he/she feels is unethical, immoral, or illegal and/or will endanger the public.

Step 2: The organizational member expresses his/her concerns to his/her immediate superior(s). The member perceives his/her superior(s) is not going to act upon his/her concerns.

Step 3a: The organizational member resigns voluntarily. His/her resignation may or may not be publicized.

and/or

Step 3b: The organizational member is expelled. He/she is either fired or forced to resign.

Step 4a: The organizational member takes his/her concerns to the regulatory body (such as a Congressional subcommittee, the courts, the Atomic Energy Commission) which is charged with overseeing the products or services offered by the organization or government agency. This step, by definition, makes the member's concerns public.

and/or

Step 4b: The organizational member takes his/her concerns to the public press, which then publicizes them.

There may be a lapse of time between Step 3a and Steps 4a or 4b. In one case, an organizational member voluntarily resigned and waited 21 years before completing Step 4a.

In the 26 cases of alumnus whistle blowing examined, only two exceptions to the above order were noted. One case occurred in the following sequence: Steps 1, 2, 4a, 3a, 4b. In the other case, the organizational member was isolated before Step 3b.

Relevant Aspects of Organizational Communication

This section includes a limited discussion of several aspects of organi-

zational communication which are relevant to whistle blowing events. This section is not an exhaustive review of organizational communication literature; complete reviews of such literature are contained in Redding (41) and Richetto (42), among other sources.

A common misconception is that communication in organizations can be "improved" by increasing the amount of communication that occurs. According to Cecil Gibb (in 18, p. 241), however, "organization implies some restrictions on communications." Redding (in 41, p. 91) notes: "The typical complex organization, because of its inevitable structuring of relationship in some kind of network, must of necessity place restrictions upon communication." To be in an "organized state," random and diffuse communication must be restricted so that various groups and specialists will receive the information that is most relevant (cf. 24, p. 225). Redding (in 41, p. 97) succinctly states:

> (a) organizations inherently tend to produce communication overload, (b) overload can be reduced by restrictions upon communication, and (c) completely open or unrestricted communication will not work.

"Without restrictions on communication, any organizationaal member--especially if he occupies a position requiring coordination or decision making--could be buried under an avalanche of incoming messages from all other members" (41, p. 92). Communication overload occurs when there is "an excess of 'input' over the ability of the message-receiver to 'handle' such input" (41, p. 87). One mechanism to reduce overload is the "exception principle" (in 45, p. 201):

> only significant deviations from standards, procedures, and policies should be brought to the attention of the superior; /that is, only/ matters of exception and not of standard practice /are brought to the attention of superiors/.

Procedures and practices such as the exception principle create problems for organizations, however. Too much information cannot be allowed to travel up the organizational hierarchy; but, on the other hand, decision makers must receive information they need. For example, Daniel (10) identifies, as a pervasive problem in all large business organizations, the difficulty of getting all relevant information to decision makers from all parts of the organization promptly and in a suitable form. Redding (in 41, p. 75) notes an "inverse relationship between hierarchical position and ability to know all the 'facts' required for decision making." March and Simon (30) posit the concept of "uncertainty absorption" to indicate that there are progressively increasing omissions of detail as a message travels up an organizational hierarchy.

All complex organizations, by definition, involve superior-subordinate relationships. The communication occurring at these crucial junctions has received much research attention. Jablin (in 22, p. 2) defines superior-subordinate communication as:

> those exchanges of information and influence between organizational members, at least one of whom has formal (as defined by official organizational sources) authority to direct and evaluate the activities of other organizational members.

This review will deal with two areas of superior-subordinate communication: (1) upward communication and (2) openness.

Upward Communication

Numerous studies have been conducted on upward communication (cf. 41). Researchers have concluded that mobility aspirations (the desire for advancement and status-seeking proclivity) and low trust in one's superior are negatively related to accuracy of upward communication (28, 39). Within a hier-

archy, if an individual has power over the advancement of people of lower rank, those of lower rank will "omit" critical comments in their communication with persons of higher rank (25). Vogel (56) maintains that subordinates perceive an inverse relationship between promotion opportunities and the extent to which they openly disagree with superiors. When information is both favorable and important, however, subordinates do not hesitate to communicate it upward to their superiors (37). To combat the potential distortion of upward communication, superiors view messages that are favorable to subordinates as less accurate than messages that are unfavorable to subordinates (50).

Subordinates perceive that superiors are more willing to listen to "positive" than to "negative" topics, while subordinates' satisfaction with their superiors and their job is correlated with their superiors' willingness to listen to them (1).

One potential block to upward communication is "semantic/information distance," Tompkins' (53) term for the "gap" in information and understanding which exists between superiors and subordinates on specified issues. Minter (33) notes that serious semantic differences between superiors and subordinates are quite frequent, occurring approximately 60 percent of the time. Superiors and subordinates have difficulty agreeing on basic job duties and demands facing subordinates (29, 43). Browne and Nietzel (7) maintain that the greater the semantic distance between superior and subordinate, the lower the morale of the subordinate.

Openness

An "open" communication relationship exists between superiors and subordinates when (in 22, p. 4):

> both parties perceive the other interactant as a willing and receptive listener, and refrain from responses which might be perceived as pro-

viding negative relational or disconfirming feedback.

Openness is an essential element for an effective organizational climate (19, 26). Employees are more satisfied with their jobs when openness of communication exists between superiors and subordinates (1, 8, 21).

Redding contends (in 40, p. 330) that there is a difference between openness in message-sending--"candid disclosure of feelings, or 'bad news,' and important company facts"--and openness in message-receiving--"encouraging, or at least permitting, the frank expression of views divergent from one's own; the willingness to listen to 'bad news' or discomforting information." Baird (1) adds that it is essential to differentiate between task-relevant and nontask-relevant openness.

Stull (49) found that for task and nontask topics, subordinates and superiors preferred supervisory responses that were accepting (ego-supportive) or reciprocating ("owning-up" to one's feelings, ideas, etc.) rather than neutral-negative (unfeeling, cold, or "non-accepting"). Building on Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (60) and Stull (49), Jablin (21, 22) found that disconfirming responses (providing a speaker with irrelevant content and equally irrelevant relational feedback) are not acceptable in superior-subordinate communication.

An Organizational Communication Approach to Whistle Blowing

Whistle blowing occurs when an organizational member bypasses the normal organizational hierarchy and takes his concerns to a higher organizational authority or to the public. The choice between taking a concern up an organizational hierarchy or outside the hierarchy to the public is clearly a choice between communication strategies. Superiors' responses to these two strategies can be explained, in part, using a perspective drawn from the

literature on organizational communication.

As discussed previously, an organization, by definition and necessity, restricts the amount of information traveling up through the hierarchy (18, 41). When potential whistle blowers attempt to take their concerns through an organizational hierarchy, they may be attempting to increase, or at least alter, the upward flow of information. They express their concerns directly to the public when they feel they cannot alter the flow of information or get a suitable response from the organization. This feeling may result because their superiors will not pass their concerns to the next level of the hierarchy or because their superiors do not respond to the concerns as the subordinates wish them to. Thus, the crucial concern becomes the superior's decision to transmit information through an organizational hierarchy, to act upon the information in the way the subordinate wishes.

Subordinates are likely to pass information to their superiors if the information is important and favorable (37). In general, a potential whistle blower may consider his/her information favorable because he/she feels they have discovered an organization problem which needs to be remedied. His/her concern shows that he/she is a conscientious employee. His/her information is unlikely to be passed up the organizational hierarchy by his/her superior, however, because this information, by definition, is unfavorable to his/her superior. Thus, his/her superior is unlikely to pass negative information to his/her own superior (25, 39). The superior is also unlikely to pass such information upward because superiors view messages which are favorable to subordinates as less accurate than messages which are unfavorable (50). A superior would be reluctant to pass on messages which he/she perceives as likely to be inaccurate.

The problem of passing information upward would be confounded by a large

"semantic/information distance" (44) between superior and subordinate, as for example, when the superior is a non-technical manager or an engineer with a different specialty than the subordinate.

Given this framework, there is a potential for whistle blowing any time a subordinate communicates information to a superior perceived to be unfavorable to the superior (assuming the superior transmits it up the organizational hierarchy). Of course, in many instances, when a superior stops a subordinate's message, the subordinate decides his/her information was unimportant and gives up. Occasionally, however, the subordinate feels that he/she has discovered something immoral, unethical, or illegal and refuses to keep silent. When the subordinate feels this way he/she is likely to bypass the communication channels normally associated with the organizational hierarchy--sometimes going directly to the public. Members of the organizational hierarchy are likely to react against him/her, in part, because he/she has publicly demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the organizational communication system. The corporate whistle blower, if his/her charges are correct, illustrates one of the dilemmas faced by all complex organizations--how to restrict the flow of information up the organizational hierarchy and, at the same time, insure that all the necessary information reaches the organizational decision makers.

This dilemma could, perhaps, be resolved using principles drawn from organizational communication literature. One potential remedy focuses on the superior-subordinate relationship.

Whistle blowing often occurs in research laboratories which employ scientists and engineers. According to Siepert (in 46, p. 92):

> Today's laboratory director cannot measure up to his staff's high expectations unless he has the interest and skills to be an effective communication chain (and buffer) between the research staff and the lay levels above.

Thus, organizational communication specialists are needed in organizations which employ scientists and engineers to help supervisors develop the skills they need to be effective managers. Sanders (44) maintains that a combination of technical ability and judgment with administrative ability and judgment is rare in scientists, but essential for managers of scientists. Organizational communication specialists can help managers of engineers develop administrative ability and judgment and perhaps, thereby, obviate the need for whistle blowing.

A second remedy involves a special technique for accomplishing more efficient upward communication--the use of ombudsmen. According to Silver (in [47], p. 77) a political ombudsman is:

> a person of some eminence, learned in law, who is appointed by a legislative body to inquire into complaints against administrative officials and to make periodic reports about his findings.

A corporate ombudsman would hear employee complaints, decide whether or not the complaint was warranted, investigate the dispute, and suggest a solution. Silver maintains that an ombudsman could explain to an employee why the employee's complaint was unwarranted. He contends (in 47, p. 79):

> one of the great problems of corporate life, and a cause for frequent grievance, is not the unfairness of management action, but the inexplicability /of it/ ...Even in corporations--where internal communications are the lifeblood of their activity--decisions are sometimes made without adequate explanation. Often, such decisions appear to be arbitrary when in fact they are not. Equally often, work discontent is caused by a lack of understanding as to reasons for such apparently unfavorable decisions. Even what at first blush appears to be "insubordination" may well be nothing more than a communication gap.

The inexplicability of corporate decisions may or may not be the cause of what Silver terms "insubordination." A corporate ombudsman will not be successful in answering the grievances of professional employees if he/she

sees his primary duty as explaining the reasons for management decisions. This action may settle disputes in some cases, but in others a professional employee may be opposed to a decision no matter what reasoning it is based upon. Thus, to be effective, a corporate ombudsman must not automatically assume that decisions made by management are correct especially when those decisions affect professional employees.

These are only two potential solutions to the growing number of reported incidents of whistle blowing. It would be naive to assume that all whistle blowing could or even should be prevented. Given the costs of whistle blowing to both organizations and individual employees, however, hopefully the need for whistle blowing can be obviated somewhat.

Reported incidents of whistle blowing are occurring with increasing frequency. Whistle blowing is both a constructive phenomenon and a destructive one. It is constructive because whistle blowers often reveal unethical practices or defects which would cause danger to the public. It is destructive because whistle blowers often suffer personal and professional harm and/or suspicion is created within organizations. As a result, the public begins to distrust the motives of all complex organizations. Perhaps organizational communication researchers can gain insights into whistle blowing which will reduce its destructive effects while, at the same time, protecting public safety and encouraging ethical behavior in organizations.

Organizational communication scholars have not studied <u>dissent</u> in organizations from a communication perspective. Dissent occurs, at least in part, through the communication of information which organizational members consider negative. More systematic research needs to be conducted to determine the nature of this information and how it is acted upon by organizational members. For example, research needs to be conducted to determine how superiors should

be trained to receive information and act upon it to meet the concerns of subordinates in the best interests of all organizational members. In this way, researchers may learn more about the determinants, forms and outcomes of whistle blowing events.

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WHISTLE BLOWING EVENTS EXAMINED FOR THIS STUDY

1. Robert S. Benson, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (38).
2. James Boyd, Assistant to the Senator Thomas J. Dodd (38).
3. Warren Braren, National Association of Broadcasters (35).
4. George Caramanna, General Motors (35).
5. Colt Firearms Company workers (35).
6. A. Dale Console, Medical Director, E.R. Squibb and Sons (35).
7. Kenneth S. Cook, Air Force Weapons Analyst (35).
8. Ray Dirks, Securities Analyst, Delafield Childs (32).
9. Henry M. Durham, Assistant Division Manager, Lockheed (27, 35).
10. Daniel Ellsberg, Rand Corporation (38).
11. Jerry W. Finefrock, Customer Representative and Installer, General Telephone (23).
12. A. Ernest Fitzgerald, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Financial Management (12, 35, 59).
13. Rudy Frank, Office of Economic Opportunity (15).
14. Peter Gall, Office of Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education and Welfare (35, 38).
15. George B. Geary, Salesman, U.S. Steel (15, 35).
16. Dr. John W. Gofman and Dr. Arthur R. Tamplin, Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, Libermore, California (14, 35).
17. Gary J. Greenberg, Attorney, Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice (38).
18. Edward Gregory, Safety Inspector, General Motors (6, 35).
19. Adam Hochschild, Army Reserve member (38).
20. Oscar Hoffman, Pipe Fitter, U.S. Navy (35).
21. Carl W. Houston, Stone and Webster (6, 35).
22. Thomas M. Howard, Cenco (15, 27).
23. James A. Kalish, Peace Corps official (38).
24. Sandra Kramer and Valerie Koster, Indian Health Service (15).

25. Terry F. Lenzer and Frank N. Jones, Office of Economic Opportunity (38).

26. Mary Lepper, Department of Health, Education and Welfare (15).

27. Dr. Stanley Mazaleski, Public Health Service (12).

28. Dr. Robert S. McCleery, Food and Drug Administration (35).

29. Patrick J. McGarvey, CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency Intelligence Officer (38).

30. John McGee, Fuel Inspector, U.S. Navy (35, 38).

31. Dr. B. Harvey Minchew, Food and Drug Administration (35).

32. John Moffat, Internal Revenue Service (15).

33. J. Anthony Morris, Virologist, Federal Vaccine Regulation Agency (5, 12).

34. Marvin Murray, Microform Data Systems (15).

35. Dr. John Nestor, Food and Drug Administration (12).

36. Ronald Ostrander, Proctor and Gamble (35).

37. Otto Otepka, Chief of Security, U.S. State Department (12).

38. Charles Pettis, Brown and Root (6, 35, 38).

39. Christopher H. Pyle, Army Intelligence Captain (38).

40. Jeffrey Record, Vietnam Veteran (38).

41. Ronald Ridenhour, Vietnam Veteran (35).

42. Al Louis Ripskis, Program Analsyt, Department of Housing and Urban Development (12).

43. Robert Rowen, Technician, Pacific Gas and Electric (15).

44. Gordon Rule, Procurement Official, U.S. Air Force (35).

45. Philip I. Ryther, Federal Aviation Administration (35).

46. Ronald H. Secrist, Insurance Executive (27).

47. Frank Serpico and David Durk, New York City Police Department (35).

48. William Stieglitz, Consultant to the Undersecretary of Commerce and Transportation (35).

49. Carl Thelin, Engineer, General Motors (35).

50. Kermit Vandivier, Scientific Writer, B.F. Goodrich (35, 55).

51. Dr. Jacqueline Verrett, Food and Drug Administration (15, 35, 38).